'NO PUEBLO REPEATS'

Spy Ship Cover Favored by Nixon

By FRED S. HOFFMAN

WASHINGTON (AP)—President-elect Nixon would prevent a recurrence of the capture of the U.S. intelligence-gathering ship Pueblo by providing more and better protection for such vessels, according to his last recorded statements on the matter.

In views expressed before and during the presidential campaign, and not publicly changed since, Nixon stated:

"I say that wherever we have —and we must have ships of this type gathering intelligence so that we will not have a surprise attack—let us make sure that we have in the area other ships or planes that can come to the rescue of such a ship in the event that it comes under attack."

SOON AFTER North Korea captured the Pueblo and its 83-man crew last January, Nixon said, "What we can do is not let this happen again."

However, Nixon stopped short during the campaign of proposing that spy ships be given escort and air cover at all times.

Nixon's view has been challenged by Johnson administration officials, spokesmen and defense officials.

BECAUSE OF the secret nature of their assignments, the spy ships cannot always be kept in the range of American naval and air units, they say.

Former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, current Defense chief Clark M. Clifford and Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, all have opposed the idea of naval escort or a jet fighter cover for intelligence ships.

Clifford said last September: "You have a ship like the Pueblo there to engage in a certain important function, that is, the gathering of information that comes over the airways. . .

"IT CAN'T be part of a large flotilla of naval vessels because that would destroy the purpose for why it's there. You can't keep a cap of fighter planes over it. That again would destroy its effectiveness."

Wheeler testified for Congress that the cost of escorting ships like the Pueblo would be "extremely high."

In some cases, Wheeler said, it would require carrier task forces "deployed thousands of miles from our shores in order to protect the vessel, which should be able to proceed freely on the high seas in accordance with international law."

IN CRITICIZING the Johnson administration's handling of the Pueblo situation soon after the capture of the ship Nixon said that "We should have either moved in with cover for the ship or we should have pulled it out of there."

Defense Department officials said that at the time, only 18 U.S. Air force jets were in the Pueblo's area and they could not have been put in the air in time to have helped.

There were no American naval units near enough to have aided the spy ship either, the officials said.

ONLY AFTER the Pueblo was grabbed by the North Koreans did the United States dispatch carriers and other powerful fighting units into the waters off Korea.